

## *The Bush Legend*

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**Abstract:** Since the nineteenth century, the legend of 'The Bush' has provided a powerful set of ideas, values and associations that continue to influence the way Australians think and talk about each other. The legend was promoted by a number of writers, historians and critics known as the radical nationalists. This group included Vance Palmer, Brian Fitzpatrick, Russel Ward and A. A. Phillips. These writers argue that bush life is central to the attitudes, values and traditions that many people regard as 'Australian' and that these qualities derive from the experience of nomadic bush workers such as shearers, swagmen and drovers. The images, ideas and arguments that you encounter in this Trail will help you to better understand the origins of this legend and the reasons why the legend continues to be a powerful force in the way Australians construct their identity. But in the selection of texts and audio-visual resources you will also encounter challenges to a dominant white male perspective. The legend of the Bush is a complex idea that deserves close attention.

### **HENRY LAWSON: 'THE DROVER'S WIFE'**

Henry Lawson's 'The Drover's Wife' was first published in the Sydney Bulletin on 23 July 1892. This issue of the Bulletin also contains the debate-in-verse about the bush between Lawson and A. B. 'Banjo' Paterson. Lawson's story can be read in the context of this debate, but a reader is also rewarded for paying close attention to the form and style that Lawson employs. Read: 'The Drover's Wife'. To better understand how the elements of Lawson's composition can affect your reading of the story, answer the following questions: Who narrates the story? What tense is used (past? present?) How are the characters depicted? Can you recognise elements of the bush legend? The pioneer legend? Think about the ways in which the situation and the characters are described in the story and compare that to the sentiments expressed in the Lawson-Paterson debate. Can the Drover's Wife be represented in this debate? And if the Drover's Wife exemplifies qualities that are distinctively Australian what position does 'The Drover's Wife' take in the Bush Legend?

### **BARBARA BAYNTON: 'THE TRAMP'**

It has been argued that in Henry Lawson's 'The Drover's Wife' the title character survives her ordeal by taking on male characteristics. Barbara Baynton's 'The Tramp' presents a similar dilemma but with a more sinister tone and with a very different outcome. The Bush Legend has often been used to bolster masculine characteristics that epitomise what it means to be Australian. But absent husbands, violent swagmen and cowardly stockman populate Baynton's story, providing a very different image of masculinity. Compare and contrast the situation and fate of the female characters in these stories. When Baynton included this story in the collection BUSH STUDIES she made significant revisions and changed the title to 'The Chosen Vessel'. How does the change of title affect the story? Read 'The Chosen Vessel' in the digital version of BUSH STUDIES from SETIS. How would you describe the relationship between the two versions?

### **UP THE COUNTRY - HENRY LAWSON**

'Henry Lawson's 'Up the Country' is an explicit critique of idealistic portrayals of the bush found in such poems as 'Clancy of the Overflow'. Published in THE BULLETIN in 1892, Lawson's poem was accompanied by a response from Paterson, 'In Defence of the Bush'. Read 'Up the Country' and compare Lawson's view of the Bush with the one expressed in 'Clancy of the Overflow'. Pay close attention to the structure of the poem and note how Lawson's imagery adds to the critique of an idealistic Bush.

### **IN DEFENCE OF THE BUSH BY A.B. "BANJO" PATERSON (1864 - 1941)**

Two weeks after Lawson's 'Up the Country' appeared in THE BULLETIN, Paterson replied with 'In Defence of the Bush'. Paterson's poem targets Lawson's incapacity to see and accept change in the Bush and that the negative elements of the Bush noted in 'Up the Country' more correctly reflect the poet's state of mind. Re-read all three poems and consider the three as a debate. Who wins?

### **CLANCY OF THE OVERFLOW BY BANJO PATERSON (1864 - 1941)**

'Banjo' Paterson's poem 'Clancy of the Overflow' examines the opposition of the 'city' and the 'bush' through the monologue of a city worker. The poem is often read as a strong expression of a city/bush opposition, but upon closer inspection, the subtle complexity of the poem becomes more apparent. This effects of this complexity can be better experienced when one looks more closely at the poem as poetry. In addition to reading the words on the page, a consideration of structure, rhythm and rhyme can add layers of meaning and provide a richer experience of the themes that the poem addresses. Read 'Clancy of the Overflow' and consider the following questions: Who is speaking? How do the different stanzas address the city/bush opposition? If the poem is the speaker's 'wild erratic fancy' what does that say about his 'visions' of Clancy and the Bush?

### **RUSSELL DRYSDALE: THE DROVER'S WIFE**

'The Drover's Wife' has remained a significant text in the minds of Australians who have attempted to depict Australian identity in literature, visual arts and film. Look closely at Russell Drysdale's painting 'The Drover's Wife' (1945). Compare and contrast this depiction of a female figure with the two stories you have read.

### **YOUTUBE - CLANCY OF THE OVERFLOW**

In 1980, the band Wallis and Matilda began its musical interpretations of A. B. 'Banjo' Paterson's poetry with a rendition of 'Clancy of the Overflow'. Watch the video of this performance and think about the continued appreciation of Paterson's poem more than ninety years after it was first published. Compare and contrast Paterson's audience with the Wallis and Matilda's audience.

**DIGITAL COLLECTIONS - PICTURES - CHAPMAN, ANDREW LACHLAN, 1954- DROVER'S WIFE, ROS LEES, WATCHES OVER THE CAMPFIRE AS DUSK APPROACHES 50 KILOMETRES SOUTH OF HAY ON THE ROAD TO DENILQUIN, NEW SOUTH WALES, 27 APRIL 2005 [PICTURE]**

In 2005 photographer Andrew Chapman composed a picture very similar to Drysdale's famous painting. Consider the periods of time in which these works of art were created: the stories were written in the 1890s; Drysdale's painting was finished in 1945; and Chapman's photograph was taken in 2005. What can be said about the persistent images of people and the bush that seem to captivate Australian writers and artists?

#### **YOUTUBE - CROCODILE DUNDEE (TRAILER)**

Images of the Bush also persist in popular culture, particularly film and television. Watch this trailer for Paul Hogan's CROCODILE DUNDEE and list images and human characteristics that are common to all of the creative works you have read and viewed. What is different about CROCODILE DUNDEE?

#### **YOUTUBE - LEE KERNAGHAN - BOYS FROM THE BUSH (ORIGINAL MUSIC VIDEO)**

The city/bush divide has been a prominent theme in Australian country music for many years. Watch the video of Lee Kernaghan's 'Boys from the Bush'.

#### **QUADRANT ONLINE - THE AUSTRALIAN LEGEND FIFTY YEARS ON**

Russel Ward wrote one of the most influential books on the Australian character in the twentieth century. As Baron Alder argues in this QUADRANT article, 'Ward's objective in The Australian Legend was to trace the historical basis for the Australian national mystique and he found it in the disproportionate influence of the mores and manners of the outback proletariat over the rest of Australian society.' Read Alder's summary of Ward's book very closely. Think about the reasons WHY humans search for and try to define a local or national identity. List the positive and negative aspects of such a search that Alder identifies in his article and add any others that come to mind. In the last decade there has been significant debate between 'white armband' and 'black armband' views of history. With a few exceptions, the dominant view of Australian identity has been white and male. How can a nation be one and many at the same time?

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